JEAN-PHILIPPE PASTOR

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2009

1. What is rhetoric?

The study and practice of effective communication.

The study of the effects of texts on audiences.

The art of persuasion.

An insincere eloquence intended to win points and manipulate others.

Defined broadly in our own time as the art of effective communication, the "rhetoric" studied in ancient Greece and Rome (from roughly the fifth century B.C. to the early Middle Ages) was primarily intended to help citizens plead their claims in court. Though the early teachers of rhetoric, known as Sophists, were criticized by Plato and other philosophers, the study of rhetoric soon became the cornerstone of classical education.

Modern theories of oral and written communication remain heavily influenced by the basic rhetorical principles introduced in ancient Greece by Isocrates and Aristotle, and in Rome by Cicero and Quintilian. Here, we will briefly introduce these key figures and identify some of their central ideas.

"Rhetoric" in Ancient Greece" The English word 'rhetoric' is derived from Greek rhetorike, which apparently came into use in the circle of Socrates in the fifth century and first appears in Plato's dialogue Gorgias, probably written about 385 B.C. but set dramatically a generation earlier. *Rhetorike* in Greek specifically denotes the civic art of public speaking as it developed in deliberative assemblies, law courts, and other formal occasions under constitutional government in the Greek cities, especially the Athenian democracy. As such, it is a cultural subset of a more general concept of the power of words and their potential to affect a situation in which they are used or received."(George A. Kennedy, A New History of Classical Rhetoric, 1994).

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Labels: audience, communication, greeks, oral, persuasion, plato, rhetorics, sophist

2. Figures of speech

The various rhetorical uses of language (such as metaphor, idiom, and chiasmus) that depart from customary construction, order, or significance. Attempts to draw strict distinctions between figures and tropes have largely been abandoned.

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Labels: figure, idiolect, language, metaphor, rhetorics, trope

3. Link typology

The role of rhetoric in relation to link typologies is not grounded in the individual relations established between a single link (or even a multiheaded link) between two nodes, but is in fact determined much more substantially by the context provided by an autonomous segment developed across several nodes, and more specifically several links.

A distinction needs to be recognized between the quantity of nodes versus the quantity of links simply because a small number of nodes can produce a significant number of autonomous segments by virtue of a high incidence of linking.

Labels: context, link, linking, node, rhetorics, segment, typology

4. Asyndeton

A writing style that omits conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses (opposite of polysyndeton).

Etymology: From the Greek, "unconnected"

Examples:

"They dove, splashed, floated, splashed, swam, snorted."
(James T. Farrell, Young Lonigan)

"Why, they've got ten volumes on suicide alone. Suicide by race, by color, by occupation, by sex, by seasons of the year, by time of day. Suicide, how committed: by poisons, by firearms, by drowning, by leaps. Suicide by poison, subdivided by types of poison, such as corrosive, irritant, systemic, gaseous, narcotic, alkaloid, protein, and so forth. Suicide by leaps, subdivided by leaps from high places, under the wheels of trains, under the wheels of trucks, under the feet of horses, from steamboats. But Mr. Norton, of all the cases on record, there's not one single case of suicide by leap from the rear end of a moving train."
(Edward G. Robinson as insurance agent Barton Keyes in Double Indemnity)

"He was a bag of bones, a floppy doll, a broken stick, a maniac."
(Jack Kerouac, On the Road)

"I have found the warm caves in the woods, filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves, closets, silks, innumerable goods"
(Anne Sexton, "Her Kind")

"In some ways, he was this town at its best--strong, hard-driving, working feverishly, pushing, building, driven by ambitions so big they seemed Texas-boastful."(Mike Royko, "A Tribute")
"Anyway, like I was saying, shrimp is the fruit of the sea. You can barbecue it, boil it, broil it, bake it, saute it. Dey's uh, shrimp-kabobs, shrimp Creole, shrimp gumbo. Pan fried, deep fried, stir-fried. There's pineapple shrimp, lemon shrimp, coconut shrimp, pepper shrimp, shrimp soup, shrimp stew, shrimp salad, shrimp and potatoes, shrimp burger, shrimp sandwich. That--that's about it."
(Bubba in Forrest Gump)

Labels: conjunction, cut, cutting, figure, phrase, rhetorics, sentence

5. Used for the whole

A synecdoche is a figure of comparison in which a word standing for part of something is used for the whole of that thing or vice versa; any part or portion or quality of a thing used to stand for the whole of the thing or vice versa -- genus to species or species to genus.

Examples

"Good evening. Elvis Presley died today. He was 42. Apparently, it was a heart attack. He was found in his home in Memphis not breathing. His road manager tried to revive him -- he failed. A hospital tried to revive him -- it failed. His doctor pronounced him dead at three o'clock this afternoon.

Note: In this case, the whole (hospital) stands in for one of its parts (the attending physician and health care workers).

"Give us this day our daily bread."
-- Matthew 6:11
Note: In this case, the part (bread) stands in for the whole (food and perhaps other necessities of life)

"And I began a little quiet campaign of persuasion with certain editors, seeking to show the unlimited possibilities for education and amusement. One would have thought that we would find willing ears on the part of the newspapers."
-- Lee De Forest
Note: Two instances of synecdoche. The first uses a part (willing ears) to stand for the whole (persons in charge of making the decisions). The second uses a part (newspapers) to stand for the whole (newspaper companies).

Labels: figure, particular, rhetorics, synecdoche, wholeness

6. Rhetorical criticism

Herman Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton University Press, 1957) attempts to formulate an overall view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism derived exclusively from literature.

Frye consciously omits all specific and practical criticism, instead offering classically-inspired theories of modes, symbols, myths and genres, in what he termed "an interconnected group of suggestions." The literary approach proposed by Frye in Anatomy was highly influential in the decades before deconstructivist criticism and other expressions of postmodernism.

Frye's four essays are sandwiched between a "Polemical Introduction" and a "Tentative Conclusion." The four essays are titled "Historical Criticism: A Theory of Modes," "Ethical Criticism: a Theory of Symbols," "Archetypal Criticism: A Theory of myths," and "Rhetorical Criticism: A Theory of Genres."

Labels: criticism, deconstruction, Frye, literary, postmodern, rhetorics

7. Persuading others

From a semiotic perspective the problem with hypertext can be understood to be one of rhetoric. By rhetoric I mean "The art of using language so as to persuade or influence others....*"The Oxford English Dictionary"*.

I would wish to extend this to include all philosophical discourse or certainly all philosophical argument. The purpose of any academic argument is to persuade others to accept the legitimacy of some viewpoint. Developing a persuasive argument is, of course, partly a matter of logic (that is some accepted code of reasonableness) and partly of evidence; but it is also partly a matter of presenting one's reasonable analysis of appropriate evidence through established print or other representational conventions.
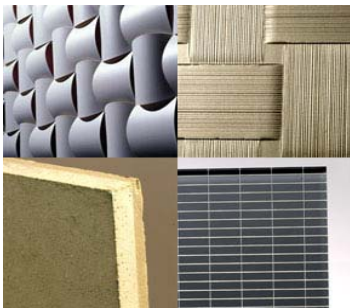
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Labels: argument, logic, philosophy, rhetorics

8. Rhetorics of links

The rhetoric of links is a reasonably common theme in the humanities hypertext literature (Burbules (1997), Ingraham (2000), Kolb (1996, 1997), Liestøl (1994), Moulthrop (1991, 1992), Landow (1994), Morgan (1999), Trigg (1983)). It is apparent, however, that much of this criticism inevitably retains a strongly literary intent - rhetoric is after all a linguistic category, and less surprisingly most who have written what the humanities would recognise as criticism come largely from the literary community.

It is reasonably easy to demonstrate very strong affinities between link node hypertext and cinema. This suggests that while a traditional rhetorical approach may be useful, it is far from adequate to account for the varieties of hypertext sequence, and indeed the model of the cinema

may provide more fertile theoretical grounds for articulating link typologies.

Metz, in his semiotic analysis of the cinema, has demonstrated the authority of the syntagmatic in relation to the paradigmatic, and Bernstein's work in hypertext can be appropriated in terms of its relevance to syntagmatic series.

Such an understanding suggests that the role of rhetoric in relation to link typologies is not grounded in the individual relations established between a single link (or even a multiheaded link) between two nodes, but is in fact determined much more substantially by the context provided by an autonomous segment developed across several nodes, and more specifically several links. (A distinction needs to be recognized between the quantity of nodes versus the quantity of links simply because a small number of nodes can produce a significant number of autonomous segments by virtue of a high incidence of linking.)

This is also supported by the example of cinema, where it is clear that there is no significant meaning that adheres to the formal nature of a connection between two shots. Most of the meaning of the connection, of the edit in itself, is determined by the larger contexts provided by the content of the shots, and the narrative itself. In other words, there is no intrinsic 'meaning' to a dissolve, its particular meaning is always determined by the contexts of its particular instantiation (and these contexts are internal - provided by a set of diegetic markers, and external - what is ordinarily the stuff of fields like reader response theory, or even hermeneutics).

In addition, once the role of the syntagmatic series is recognized as a potentially richer notion of minimal narrative unit in hypertext, it becomes clear that the paradigmatic aspect of hypertext, at least in terms of linking practice, allows us to recast how we consider link rhetoric and grammar.

What is extremely important in this claim, however, is not only the relevance of cinema to hypertext as a narrative system, but equally the erosion of an artificial division between genres of discourse that strives to emphasis the distance between the literary and the technical. Ironically, though formal semiotics has been instrumental in identifying qualities that inherently distinguish the literary from the non-literary, this distinction is today largely ignored as the importance of context and the reader is acknowledged.

Adrian Miles: Hypertext syntagmas: cinematic narration with links

*A performative hypertext presented by Journal of Digital Information*

10. Rhetorical reading

If as readers of literature we can no longer guarantee a fully controllable text, then so long as we can show where these limitations reside, we have won considerable interpretive **freedom** for our rhetorical readings.

Labels: literature, reading, rhetorics

11. Grammatical structures and tropes
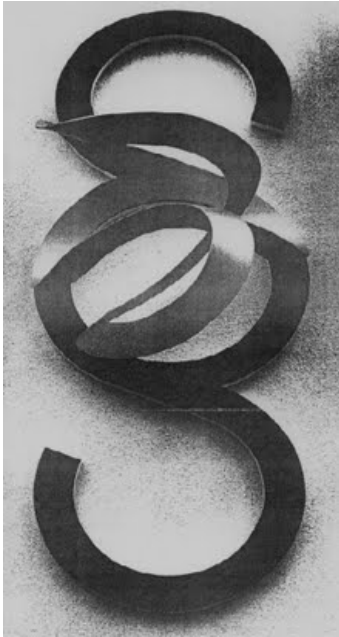
In literary structuralism, especially in France, the analysis of deep **grammatical structures** went hand in hand with the analysis of **rhetorical tropes** (figures of discourse).

What this means is that the two axes of language, the syntagmatic (at the level of the generated sentence) and the paradigmatic (the axis of substitutions) can be read as operating together in a discourse. We can thus explain what **Paul de Man** means by "assimilations of rhetorical transformations or combinations to syntactical, grammatical patterns" with reference to the coexistence in structuralist theory of patterns of both metonymy (which is syntagmatic) and metaphor (which is paradigmatic).

Labels: grammar, metonymy, rhetorics, structuralism, trope

12. Rhetoric and grammar

The difference between metaphorical substitutions and metonymic combinations (rhetoric and grammar) can be seen as a kind of repetition of a deeper and older opposition: between *rhetoric and logic.*

But (a big, big but) metonymy is not a grammatical category. It is no less figurative than metaphor. The predicative structure of a sentence (noun/verb/phrase) cannot guarantee its meaning.

Labels: grammar, logic, rhetorics, sentence

13. Rhetorical reading

The grounds of literary meaning (and by extension all meaning) must be located in rhetoric rather than in any of the other possible dimensions (form, content, reference, grammar, logic etc.).

But a rhetorical reading cannot guarantee authority over interpretations. Therefore there is no authority that can guarantee a reading. This doesn't license us to read a text just anyway we want to. Rather it commits us to readings that take full account of the possibilities and limits of reading (and writing) generally.

Labels: interpretation, literary, meaning, reading, rhetorics

14. Extrinsic criticism

Criticism should start looking *outside* the text to the extra-textual world of real references.

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a parodic critique of the communist revolution (and by association, all such revolutions). Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a not so subtle warning to King James (it was first played to him and his small court) not to lose his throne. What we have come to understand as historicism develops as a way of extending the reach of our literary knowledge so that we can talk about its relation to historical events and processes. This is what we might call **extrinsic criticism.** The text now has its meaning located outside itself.

What fundamentally we are left with is a defining distinction—that is not itself fully explicable— between fiction or, more generally, rhetoric and reality.

Labels: criticism, fiction, meaning, reference, rhetorics

15. Rhetoric and figures

Rhetoric, simply stated, is the art of persuasion — using language to convince or sway an audience — or the study of that art.

Able rhetoricians, including good writers and good lawyers, know how to make their points effectively, by arranging their arguments and choosing the appropriate language in which to convey them.

Classical rhetoricians divided the field into several varieties:

Deliberative rhetoric, the art of persuading an audience to take (or not to take) some action — think of senators addressing their peers, or lobbyists addressing their representatives;

Forensic rhetoric, the art of making a persuasive case in a legal matter, as when a lawyer argues for or against an accused person;

Epideictic rhetoric, the use of powerfully affective language to praise or blame someone or something — most odes are epideictic oratory, as are most inaugural addresses.

Those who study rhetoric have classified many hundreds of figures of speech, sometimes strictly ornamental, but often concerned with achieving certain effects. Many of them are used only by professional rhetoricians *(erotesis, hypophora, epidiorthosis),* and you needn't worry about them. But others are handy means of describing uses of literary language.

16. Rhetorical argumentation
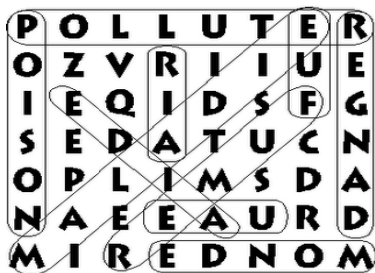
I define "rhetorical argumentation" as essentially an argument meant to persuade.

I think in many ways all communication is an attempt to persuade: to persuade people to take action, to read the next line of your work, to grant that you have a good point. For this work, I'm interested in the issues raised by arguing on the Web, and how that diff

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